

**Saugatucket River Heritage Corridor Coalition
Report to the State of Rhode Island Watershed Council
October 30, 2002**

Organizational Status

The Saugatucket River Heritage Corridor Coalition (SRHCC) is an all volunteer 501-c-3 organization established in 1994 to protect and promote the Saugatucket River and its watershed. The Coalition consists of community, civic, and neighborhood organizations to pursue this mission including the following: All of the work performed by the group during this reporting period has been done by volunteers. **Over 300 manhours of volunteer time have been contributed to the mission of the SRHCC in the last year. This is the equivalent of \$10,500 in funds, roughly matching our River's Council grant for 2001. Two new member organizations have been added this year. Given the constraints of operating solely with volunteers and the real need to move our mission forward, the SRHCC Board is now actively pursuing funding for part-time professional staff. The most significant accomplishments in 2002 have been the TMDL work, completion of the Main Street East project and the interest of the Town of South Kingstown in moving ahead with some of this projects recommendations, the upgrading of our website, the initiation and completion of open space projects in the Watershed, and the testing of the GrateMates initiative.**

SRHCC member organizations

Advisory Council on Trees for South Kingstown
Appalachian Mountain Club – Narragansett Chapter
Friends of the Kingston-Narragansett Bike Path
Historic Downtown Merchants Association
Indian Lake Association
Peace Dale Neighborhood and Pond Association
Rhode Island Watershed Watch
Salt Ponds Coalition
Shadow Farm Condominium Association
Sierra Club – Rhode Island Chapter
South County Tourism Council
South Kingstown Chamber of Commerce
South Kingstown Historic District Commission
South Kingstown Land Trust
South Kingstown Neighborhood Congress
Sunnybrook Farm Homeowners Association
Town of South Kingstown (ex officio)
University of Rhode Island
Wakefield Elementary School Kids Who Care

Current Financial Status Summary (please see attached Treasurer's report and the draft 2003 budget for more information)

As of October 30, 2002 the SRHCC's financial situation is as follows:

Certificates of Deposit (2): \$18,502
Checking Account: \$9,544

Committed Assets: Saugatucket River Walkway and related projects \$15,790
Discretionary Funds: \$12,256

Projected Revenue to end of year (12/31/2002) \$5,000
Projected Expenses to end of year \$3,203
Projected balance in Discretionary Funds at end of year \$14,053

Activities Summary for 2002 (more detailed information and appropriate copies of work products are available upon request)

The Saugatucket River Heritage Corridor Coalition completed and adopted a vision plan in the mid-1990s. This plan, entitled *Saugatucket River Hometown*, delineates a work plan of items to accomplish over an extended time frame. So far the Coalition has implemented a number of the action items outlined in the plan. As in 2001, in 2002, the Coalition continued with implementation, focusing efforts within the primary action areas outlined in the plan: Environmental Protection, Recreation, Historic Preservation and Economic Development. These action areas are not mutually exclusive. In fact they are intertwined and they reinforce each other. In addition, the Coalition has a broad educational function, which benefits all of the action areas. In addition to our vision plan, with our input, RIDEM has prepared a Watershed Partnership action agenda for the Saugatucket which we have adopted. This action list is a refinement of our vision plan's environmental agenda with a near term focus.

The following is an itemized list of our program accomplishments for the year 2002.

Education and Public Awareness-Building:

Rivers Day 2002 was a great success, with events throughout the Southern Rhode Island region. In the Saugatucket watershed, we had a morning river cleanup and an evening Historic Downtown Merchants Association block party including fires in the river. This has now become an annual event that attracts town wide support and interest in Main Street and the River.

The SRHCC sponsored a second TMDL meeting (assisted by our Brown University Interns) in the Spring of 2002 with concerned community members, SRHCC Board Members, and RIDEM staff. a meeting had a focus of discussion of the river TMDL findings and suggestions for remediation.

Volunteers of the SRHCC and the South Kingstown High School Science Department launched a research program on the efficacy of the GrateMates program (Planet CPR) with the installation of a sample filter in the late Spring of 2002. This device has been monitored throughout the summer and early fall and has recently been removed for analysis. Another filter is due for installation in November. The high school program will be further explored pending evaluation of the filter's effectiveness in the New England climate.

Recently, the SRHCC has been approached by a charter school located on the river for educational programming. This will be explored this fall and in early 2003. Volunteers from the SRHCC will research and provide general curriculum materials.

Through extensive volunteer support the SRHCC web site (www.saugatucket.org) was extensively upgraded with the addition of the vision plan, action plan /agenda and maps.

Environmental Protection - Land Use/Non Point Sources of Pollution:

As the official Watershed Council for the Saugatucket under State of Rhode Island Planning Office authority, we receive information on funding programs and make suggestions for the location and scope of protection and remediation efforts. Our goal is to assume a more aggressive role in reviewing development projects that impact the river. The Rhode Island Sierra Club is helping us to research other states where watershed councils have been more empowered than in Rhode Island. Our goal is to have a more official role for reviewing and commenting on development projects in the watershed. In 2002 we asked by the Town Planning Board to assist with review and comment on a multi-unit housing development in close proximity to Rocky Brook. This, however, was only one of several projects moving forward in the town permitting stage. We have commented in the past on only a handful of projects at the invitation of the South Kingstown Planning Board. Although this function has been one of our concerns in fulfilling our role as a watershed council, to date we are not aware of any assistance from the River's Council on this role, other than a legal clarification. The SRHCC would like to continue working on an appropriate protocol for project review and comment with River's Council assistance.

The SRHCC completed a design enhancement project entitled Main Street East this fall (under a grant from the Rhode Island Foundation) which demonstrates how Tower Hill Road in Wakefield could be redeveloped into a more pedestrian-friendly, character-defining gateway to historic Wakefield. An important component of the project has been promotion of the reconfiguring landscaping and resurfacing the vast parking lots and impervious surfaces in this area of town (it is nearly 90% paved) to create a more acceptable means of treating storm water runoff. The project was exhibited and described at several public venues and meetings. Recently the Town of South Kingstown has initiated a follow up design and planning project to evaluate rezoning the area to enable some of the *New Urbanist* concepts proposed by the project to be implemented. The SRHCC will continue to promote the adoption of non-point pollution bmps in this effort.

The Town of South Kingstown adopted the Peace Dale Revitalization Plan removing the action items in the draft document concerning land use and the river, despite our objections. We have advised the Town that we are concerned about the paving of a large parking area (currently a gravel parking lot) and hope that non point bmps are followed. The draft Plan cited several areas of concern regarding Rocky Brook as it flows through Fisk Flats, the core area of the plan. The Town removed this from the Plan.

The SRHCC participated in and monitored the progress of the *South County Greenspace Protection Project*. We will continue to monitor the adoption of the project's principals in the updating of the comprehensive plans of the towns within the Watershed.

Environmental Protection - Clean Up and Preservation of River Quality:

The United States Environmental Protection Agency is working with the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management and the Towns of South Kingstown and Narragansett to clean up the Rose Hill Landfill, declared a Superfund toxic waste site in 1988. We are closely monitoring the ongoing process and will continue to seek independent funding for cleanup of a sewage sludge area leaching into the river, not included in the Superfund remediation plan. The responsible Towns of Narragansett and South Kingstown have now allocated sufficient funds to begin the project. Of concern is a future reuse plan for the property, which the Town of South Kingstown has now acquired. We will monitor the process of land planning for this area, although we have not been invited to participate in anyway..

We have frequent (4-in 2002) river and greenway cleanups, tree plantings, and days for maintenance and expansion of nature and hiking trails in the watershed. We sponsor Saugatucket Park, adjacent to the river under the Town of South Kingstown's Adopt-a-Park program, and provide funding and labor enhancement and maintenance of the garden there.

We are working to teach citizens of the importance and the possibility of preserving and improving water quality to fishable/swimmable levels. Members of the Coalition are active in both RI Watershed Watch and the Salt Ponds Coalition, serving as volunteer water quality monitors in Saugatucket Pond and in the river below Main Street on its way to Point Judith Pond. We are helping the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management by publicizing its meetings on its Saugatucket watershed water quality assessment (TMDL) now underway or in stages of completion.

We plan to undertake river and trail cleanups in 2003 to continue building river stewardship in our active volunteer group.

This year and next will be significant times to digest and discuss the TMDL findings. The TMDL work for the River has already generated interest and concern for the non-point pollution generated off the large paved surfaces of the strip development on Tower Hill Road. There is great interest in the TMDL work for the Upper Point Judith Pond now underway. The SRHCC has been assisting RIDEM with public outreach on this work as well as the monitoring stations on the Upper Pond.

The SRHCC may have a vital role to play in 2003 with public outreach for Phase II remediation, provided funding can be procured by the Town of South Kingstown through the 319 program.

Environmental Protection - Preservation of Open Space, Habitat, Natural Resources, and Features:

We are making suggestions on desirable land acquisitions to protect the watershed and expand the Saugatucket River Green Corridor to our member organization, the South Kingstown Land Trust. We also continue to pursue land gifts in the river corridor on our own. Underway, in the past two years has been a project to obtain conservation easements on the west side of Saugatucket Pond. This is moving forward very slowly. Our goal is to help protect water quality and habitat and to

preserve from residential over-development the scenic value of existing forested views. SRHCC member organization SK Land Trust recently completed a land preservation project in the watershed protecting over 40 acres of land in the greenway. This project connects other open space lands in a small open space corridor adjacent to the river on the west side of the watershed. Additional efforts are underway led by the Town of North Kingstown for conservation of significant tracts of land in the Saugatucket headwaters area north of Rte 138 and west of Tower Hill Road. We have provided input from our vision plan for a Saugatucket Green Corridor, on habitat/water quality protection concerns, and on a brownfield restoration project for the river and adjacent areas from Church to Main Streets. The Town of South Kingstown's Greenway Plan further supports open space protection the Saugatucket corridor as does the South County Greenspace Protection Project. The SRHCC participated in both of these planning projects to provide support for the concept.

Recreation:

Construction of the Saugatucket River Pedestrian Walkway in the Historic Downtown Main Street District is expected to be begun in 2003, with the project going out to bid in late 2002. We continue to attend sporadic planning meetings with the designer, the Town of South Kingstown Planning Office and Public Works Department, and the Rhode Island Department of Transportation. This project has sparked renewed interest in downtown Wakefield.

Although a great deal of work has been done by the SRHCC to plan, clean up, improve and expand hiking trails in the watershed, a trail map is still needed to help residents to find and to follow the trails. We have been developing a trail map to be posted on signs and available at central sites. Another goal is expansion of the hiking trails both northward in the watershed (toward Indian Lake) and southward (toward Marina Park and Point Judith Pond). We continue to work with local Boy Scout troops, our member organization, the Appalachian Mountain Club, and with landowners who have indicated they are willing to give conservation easements for the trails. The Town of South Kingstown is planning trail development on the new Middle School site, which will eventually link to the river trail network within the Saugatucket Green Corridor.

There has also been renewed interest in a Saugatucket Blue Trail or River access trail. The SRHCC will continue to work on this.

Historic Preservation - Preservation of Cultural and Historic Landscapes and Features:

The National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program has provided us with attractive trail markers, with space for number codes. We continue to work on a self-guided walking tour of historic sites, to be keyed to a brochure.

We applied for a field education session tour on the river and area revitalization for the annual national conference of the National Trust for Historic Preservation to be held in Providence in the fall of 2001. Although this field session never came to fruition, the tour schedule remains as a base for the further development and refinement of the self-guided walking tour

The SRHCC has been monitoring several projects affecting historic resources in the watershed. The architecturally significant cupola of the historic Peace Dale Mill has been removed by the

owners for restoration. The Town of South Kingstown is repairing the historic stone bridge over River Run. The Pettaquamscutt Historical Society held a successful tour of houses within the watershed this fall. The historic Kenyon's Store building in Wakefield has been sold for retail use and is being painted. Additional historic preservation work continues on historic Wakefield's Main Street. The National Trust (for Historic Preservation) Main Street program has fueled additional interest in historic preservation projects, included one whole block of deteriorated wood-framed buildings which have now been substantially rehabilitated and preserved. With completion of the Saugatucket River Walkway (Phase I) projected in 2004, there will be a renewed interest in the rear – river-facing- facades of the historic buildings on Main Street in Wakefield. The SRHCC will work on appropriate design guidelines for these buildings to enhance the character of this area and the Walkway itself.

Economic Development:

Our vision includes promoting the environment and heritage of the river for economic revitalization. Creating a sense of place can lead to river corridor-friendly business development and entrepreneurial pursuits — such as businesses that provide support for the bikeway in Wakefield and Peace Dale, canoe and kayak rentals, cafes, shops, and restaurants. In the process searching for a site for our hoped-for Saugatucket Green Corridor interpretive center, we identified several sites along the river that are perceived as undesirable due to their prior use for home heating oil and propane storage. We are investigating brownfield restoration programs that may change these unattractive and vacant sites to desirable locations for appropriate riparian uses.

In 2000-2001, the mill villages of Peace Dale and Wakefield have received revitalization assistance, the first a planning grant and the latter Main Street RI designation. We are working closely with the Friends of Peace Dale and the Historic Downtown Merchants Association to encourage improvements which will use the River as an amenity and a destination. A significant area of activity for the future will be a reuse/ preservation plan for the large and historic Peace Dale Mill complex. The Peace Dale Revitalization Plan, adopted this year, includes action items to enhance the economic climate in the core area of Peace Dale.

Capacity Building

The SRHCC welcomed two new member groups in 2002, Advisory Council on Trees for South Kingstown and the Wakefield Elementary School Kids Who Care.

The renting of a large office space near the river has created a work and meeting space that has become invaluable to the program. This space also serves as a meeting space for several of the SRHCC member groups.

The SRHCC experimented in 2002 with an internship program – first with Brown University and more recently with the University of Rhode Island. This program has had a mixed review in terms of success. Our findings are that interns do require professional staff to manage their work unless they are willing to work directly with volunteers on specific tasks.

Efforts are underway to secure funds for a part-time staff – executive director – position. This will greatly add to the ability of the SRHCC to promote its programs, attend important policy-making meetings, and undertake coordinate its work following the Action Plan.

Organization Action Plan (see attached Action Plan Chart)

General Status of the Watershed - Threatened

Despite our efforts to the contrary, there is no change in that the Saugatucket River and its watershed continue to be one of South County's most threatened resources.

Watershed Watch testing indicates no improvement in water quality and significantly a steady decline over the last five years. This indicates to us that the watershed and the river remain threatened resources, although the SRHCC has increased public awareness of the existence of the river and the new TMDL work is shedding some light on sources of pollution and desirable remediation measures.

Not only is the watershed the focus of continued growth within all of the watershed towns, but its value as a natural, cultural and economic resource has been significantly neglected for a considerable period of time. It is only within the last decade that the Town of South Kingstown acknowledged its presence as potentially important greenway for natural habitat protection and appropriate, limited, trail developing considered for open space protection. Significantly the Town of North Kingstown has begun to seriously plan for protection of the Saugatucket headwaters. North Kingstown planning efforts have succeeded in promoting open space zoning for this portion of the watershed and several key parcels are being considered for protection. To our knowledge the Town of Exeter has not included such planning initiatives for their portions of the watershed. The Town of Narragansett has proceeded with land protection strategies for portions of the watershed on or near Point Judith Pond, the Saugatucket's estuary and is interested in the ongoing TMDL research.

The Towns of South Kingstown, Narragansett, and North Kingstown continue to grow at unprecedented rate, with South Kingstown leading. The South Kingstown Comprehensive Plan channels growth into the core urban area of town – Wakefield and Peace Dale – within the heart of the Saugatucket River watershed. The most alarming new growth permitted by the Town of South Kingstown will occur in the eastern watershed along Route 1 in a massive new mixed use commercial/office/residential development known as the Village at South County Commons. This development was programmed by the Town's comprehensive plan before the establishment of the Coalition. Review and permitting of this project – the largest project in the history of the town -- did not include a request for advisory comments from the Coalition. To date there is a great concern that river quality will be adversely affected by future non-point pollution via Indian Run, a tributary of the Saugatucket which runs through the development site. Already construction has partially rerouted the stream and caused erosion and siltation problems and RIDEM has cited the developers for wetland violations. It is feared that the current situation is only a prelude for more damage in the near term with chronic associated problems in the future as construction continues. The project build-out includes nearly ten acres of asphalt parking surface alone. The amount of impervious surface created by parking and building coverage (over 10 acres of asphalt) will be a

significant influence upon the eastern watershed. The area programmed for development in the town's comprehensive plan is significantly larger than the current development. This area also lies within the eastern watershed and will contribute to impacts to Indian Run and the Saugatucket River.

Within the northern watershed in the Town of North Kingstown, large portions of forested tracts are being converted to large lot suburban housing. This conversion has created alarm with the Town of North Kingstown Conservation Commission, representatives of which have been in communication with the SRHCC seeking support for remediation and land protection. Within the South Kingstown portion of the northern watershed, forested lands on Rose Hill Road are being developed with at least 75 new homes. This activity is putting additional pressure on the upper Saugatucket, decreasing available storm water management functions. While it is assumed that RIDEM and town review of storm water management systems will account for adequate mitigation, there is a real concern that the town's sedimentation and erosion control ordinances will not adequately protect the river and its tributaries in the near term while the projects are under construction. Development pressure exists also within the western and southern watershed areas.

There has been no change to the Saugatucket's water quality ratings. RIDEM's TMDL work on the river (recently undertaken) has now indicated water quality influences caused by animal waste, both wild and domestic. The SRHCC will seek remediation of these threats in the near term. The Rose Hill Landfill continues to threaten the Saugatucket system south of Saugatucket Road. The SRHCC will continue to seek the remediation of the Superfund site as soon as possible, while continuing to pressure for further investigation of the impacts of the sewage sludge facility and subsequent remediation. It is hoped the continuing TMDL research will shed light on the eutrophication of Saugatucket Pond and the causes of the rapid siltation of the Pond's northern lobe and the occurrence at North Road of significantly warmed water temperatures. (This section of the Pond, located across North Road from the South County Sand and Gravel plant is rapidly filling in and does not freeze in winter). While there have been wetlands violations in the past within this area, members of the SRHCC remain concerned that there is not been so far an adequate explanation for the changes in water quality in this area. The TMDL work will, however, be helpful in shedding light on the situation and eliminating other sources.

As indicated by this narrative the general status of the Watershed has remained constant for the three years we have provided a report. Our concerns remain virtually the same from 2000. We are, however, buoyed by the increased awareness by the community and recognize that it will take considerably more work and time to see real improvements in Watershed resource stewardship and active participation by the Watershed's residents and user groups.